



I am one out of seven in my family that is not an alcoholic. When I was a kid, law enforcement got involved and it went to court. My dad's drinking buddy, the judge, sent me to Winnebago State Hospital for 30 days, which was a mental institution. It was decided that there was nothing wrong with me, but the judge said I couldn't stay at home. I was sent to a boy's home in Wittenberg. After graduation, I had seven jobs and eventually volunteered for the draft because my number was small.

I went into the Army on January 9, 1969 and went to Fort Campbell, KY. I volunteered for Recovery School to drive anything the Army had. After AIT, I went to White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. I spent a lot of time in the desert watching rockets fall out of the sky. I picked up the first model of the space shuttle in November 1969. By that time, I was one of five Army personnel to wear a NASA patch. I'm proud of that and I still have my jacket.

I left White Sands on June 11, 1970 to go to Oakland and then to Bien Hoa, Vietnam on July 3, 1970. People on the ground looked like they were in a hurry and as the pilot parked the plane, he said stay seated until I stop and then get the hell out if we come under attack. Everyone ran down the steps and there was a platoon of grunts laughing at us because we were newbies, scared newbies. We got on the bus and there were screens on the windows, big heavy inch screen. I said holy Christ you have some big mosquitos around here. The driver said no it wasn't for mosquitos, it was for grenades. Hearing that, my butt puckered.

I spent seven days with the transit company and was going to Dongha, which was four miles from the DMZ. I knew I didn't want to go there. I landed in Quang Tri, which was about 10 miles south of Dongha. I got off the plane and there was nothing but a Conex box with only one guy and only one phone. He made a call and I waited 45-minutes for the truck to come down. Four of us got into the back of a three quarter-ton pickup driving down the road with absolutely no protection. I decided I was going to lay on the floor and make myself a smaller target, while the other three sat on the bench. We got to Dongha at just about dark. The guards were yelling to shut the lights off or they would shoot them out. I thought oh my god, this is a bad place.

The Motor Pool was across the highway and the next morning I checked in at the office. I was shown around, and my main recovery vehicle was a wrecker. There was also a Track Recovery Vehicle. About two months later, the main wrecker operator rotated back to the United States and they gave it to me. I had ridden shotgun a couple of times, but that's not the same as driving.

Sometime in September the whole Battalion went on a convoy to Camp Love on the northside of Da Nang. We got settle down in the motor pool and everything was normal for a little while. On December 10, 1970, I was supposed to go out to a fire base about 2-3 miles down the road from our base camp. I was in Da Nang, which was a safe area and I didn't take anybody riding shotgun with me because it was a short distance. I didn't roll my window down for some reason and I drove out the gate, made a left turn and there were three kids standing on a pile of dirt. They were waiving at me saying "#1 GI". I waived at them, smiled and looked back to where I was going. I heard a crack and saw that



my window was broken. I thought those little bastards were throwing rocks at me. But it wasn't a rock; it was a grenade. It dropped down and lodged between the running board and the fuel tank. The grenade went off, then the fuel tank went off and it cracked the valved the acetylene tank right above the fuel tank. It kicked me out the door and I broke three ribs. I was halfway conscious, and I saw the track vehicle almost a foot from me. He damn near ran me over because the driver was watching my wrecker out in the rice patty. A guy in the jeep behind him stopped and it looked like they were talking to me. I could see their lips moving, but I couldn't hear anything. I was taken to the infirmary and was kept for about three hours. I had to stay in my bunk for three weeks until I could hear someone coming through the door. I then went on R&R to China Beach on the other side of Da Nang. I woke up the next day being told I had to go back because we were going up north. Out of my three-day R&R, I got a day and a half.

I got a refurbished wrecker, that didn't have much power and would backfire. It was the only thing I had to drive, and I wasn't happy. We found out were going back to Dongha past Khe Sanh. The mission was Lam Son 719. In Khe Sanh in 1968 there was an air strike a couple of miles from North Vietnam. They got hammered really bad and the airplanes couldn't even land. They'd skim across the runway and kick down the back door. The people on the ground had to figure out a way to get it off the runway. We had to go beyond Camp Carroll and the first night we stayed at an abandoned air strip, which was already set up for someone else. The Maintenance Unit was parked on the other side of a small hill and had dug out slots on the side of the hill for the helicopters. In the morning, we woke up and were sitting around a small campfire and heard something. It looked like there was water running down the hill and I could smell gasoline. That noise we heard were projectiles and it was again a butt puckering moment. I was sitting in the middle of a gasoline bowl and I didn't want to turn the truck off because if it backfires it would take out the whole works. I was able to fill my truck up with gas and go back to my outfit. We were all lucky.

We got back on the road going back to Khe Sanh and ended up at Fire Base Fireball. We stayed there quite a while; I can't remember how long. I was going on ammo runs. I came back from an ammo run and I was glad I was back. Someone told me a gun had blown up. The next day I had to go get that gun and the whole back end of the gun blew off. The number two man got hit in the chest and it killed him.

March 21-23 of 1971 was my only rough term. The NVA had come across the DMZ and overran one of our firing batteries. There were four guns in a battery, and everyone got on anything that was moving to get out of there. Then we got ambushed 2-3 times on the way out. I was coming back from an ammo run and the VTR was parked at the gate. I was looking at the driver and thinking what the hell was he doing in there? He told me that B Battery was overrun, and we had to go get the guns. I knew that Charlie was sitting on the guns waiting for us. I grabbed my M-16 and two ammo boxes. There were only three seats on that machine: the driver, the commander and the rigger. There was no room for me, so I jumped on the hood. The Commander said what the hell are you doing, and I said I was going to do my job. He told me I couldn't leave my truck in a combat zone. I said it was inside the wire and



once they get inside, they weren't going to stop. He told me he'd put me in for a court-martial. I didn't think I was coming back from that run and I told him if we get back; have at it. If I hadn't gone and someone would have been killed doing my job, I don't think I could have lived with myself. It was my job.

It took three days to get four guns and there was firefight all the way. Vehicles were hitting mines and had to go thru the woods to get around them. We could hear B-52's dropping bombs miles away. We went around a corner and there was a tank coming at us, so we had to back up. The lead tank pulled alongside of us with a bird Colonel asking where we were going. I told him what we were doing, and he asked where was our support? He told us we couldn't go out without support and turned his four tanks around and led us back into that shit. While we were parked, I was standing on the side of my vehicle and I saw something moving out of the corner of my eye. I glanced over and just as I got focused, I saw a puff of smoke. I followed that RPG right over me. It hit an infantry unit and there was a direct hit on a guy's left hand. I jumped down to see if I could help him and as I got to him, the guy to his left side was bleeding from the neck and I knew I had to help him first. I grabbed his neck and probably squeezed him so hard he couldn't breathe. By the neck and the belt, I ran him to the Red Cross and literally threw him in. I ran back to the guy with his hand and heard our vehicles moving. I looked back and forth a couple of times and decided I had to go. I hated leaving that guy.

The guys were already turning to go down the road. I jumped, caught the step and crawled up. We went down the road about 100 yards where the trees opened, and we were ambushed. We got thru that ambush and a cobra came around and ambushed them from behind. I swear I could see the pilot smiling; he did a good job. We got our last gun and came back to the same ambush alley. Somehow, we got thru it. We got all four guns back, but it took three days to do it.

I got into Oakland on July 3, 1971 and came home on July 4th. That was the end of the military for me. I'm still thinking about my military career 50 years later. I started coming to the Tomah VA in 1980. I'm happy with my care at the VA. I had a hard time coming to Tomah because my dad and brother always told me that they had a psych ward here and that was stuck in my head. I sat in the truck a long time before I opened the door to get out the first time, but I didn't want to. The next time I went, I sat a lot longer in the truck thinking someone was going to keep me here, thinking about the time as a kid at Winnebago. I took four trips to Tomah and on the fourth trip I didn't go in and went back home. That is when I started counseling. It took 6-8 months before they talked me into going again. I now get my primary care in Wausau and my dental care at the Green Bay VA. Sometimes getting my primary care is a hassle, but I get it done. At my age nothing is a rush for me. I always thought I would die in an accident while I was driving, but I beat that. Death will come and I have no problem with it, but I have to get some of these pictures out of my head.

I've been going to my unit's reunions for many years now. One time my wife wouldn't let me go because of my back surgery, and I was quite upset. She left me after 44 years and now I haven't missed one.